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The Life and Works of Jonathan Swift

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THE LIFE AND WORKS OF JONATHAN SWIFT

Jonathan Swift, if he had no other claim to our interest, would compel that interest by the single fact that he was the most intense, systematic, unequivocal and deadly hater who ever lashed an enemy with a phrase; our interest is heightened by the fact that this man's enemy (to use the word perhaps too freely) was the whole human race. "I heartily hate and detest that animal called man, although I heartily love John, Peter, Thomas, and so forth."* His nature, beaten firmly into its original shape by early rough contacts with life, was auspicious to hatred. He was a bundle of belligerent sensitiveness. He had a terrible temper—was ridden by pride—had strong and restless, if narrow, ambitions—and walked always in the valley of discontent under deepening shadows of gloom. Scornfully tearing from life its pretty wrappings of illusion, he gazed with somber and prosaic eye upon a raw spectacle of brutality, ignorance and sham, at once gross and petty. He had little softness in him, and none of the spirit of resignation; however hopeless, he would rage bitterly at fate, living in a turmoil of tortured thoughts that from the beginning held intimations of insanity. He did not get what he wished out

*Letter to Pope, September 29, 1725.

of life; yet his life was colorful and commanding. He was the all-powerful adviser of England's ruling statesmen during one of the most tumultuous periods of English politics. He was, surely in point of influence, the leading figure in the literary world of his day—was intimate with Addison, Steele, Pope, Gay and Arbuthnot. He, more than any other writer in all literature, may be said to have created a style. He wrote one book that stands alone among the books of all ages, above comparison in a lofty and awful distinction. With no power but his pen, he stirred into being and led to success a dramatic revolt of a whole country, and he died greatly loved and honored by its people. He was passionately loved by two remarkable women. But to this man, politics was a cheat; literature a bitter weapon; fame an empty thing; love, it seems, a physical impossibility; and he died, bearing out his own grim prediction, "at the top first"*—a pathetic imbecile during the last few years of his life. About his life there hangs a curtain of mystery that has never been lifted.

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*Dr. Young, the author of "Night Thoughts," tells of walking with Swift and a small party of friends, just outside of Dublin; the Dean stopped and looked thoughtfully at an elm tree, the top of which had been struck by lightning. Pointing to the tree, the Dean remarked to his friend. "I shall be like that tree; I shall die first at the top."

I.

Swift's times furnished a stormy background for his life. The generation that preceded his birth had witnessed the rule of Oliver Cromwell, following the execution of King Charles I. in 1648. During the time of the first Charles and that of Cromwell, England had passed through an extended period of trouble and bloodshed. In 1660, seven years before the birth of Swift, occurred the Restoration which placed Charles II. on the throne. This monarch did a great deal of butchering in revenge for the beheading of his father; and his reign was as profligate as it was bloody. It was in 1665, two years before Swift was born, that London was devastated by the Great Plague, which killed one hundred thousand people, and by the Great Fire, which made homeless twice this number. War—the fruit of greed, jealousy and all manner of intrigue—was quite the fashion, and almost any pretext served for the clash of arms. England fought Spain, as the result of treacherous negotiations for a marriage between the Prince of one country and the Princess of the other; later England was embroiled with France; then with the Dutch; then, in alliance with France, England fought Spain; and, again, English and Dutch fought side by side against the French. In the latter war against France, Swift played an important part politically and was chiefly instrumental in bringing about a peace. In the midst of these foreign wars, civil war was intermittent.

Swift saw a great deal of war, and his contempt for it is shown in his satirical account, in *Gulliver's Travels*, of the war between Lilliput and Blefuscu. The widespread and complicated strife of the day undoubtedly inspired this particular piece of satire, and as it is always significant and interesting to follow in a man's works his observations of the contemporary human scene, I shall quote Swift's account of the origin of this imaginary warfare, with its fairly obvious parallel:

"It began upon the following occasion: It is allowed on all hands, that the primitive way of breaking eggs, before we eat them, was the larger end; but his present majesty's grandfather, while he was a boy, going to eat an egg, and breaking it according to the ancient practice, happened to cut one of his fingers; whereupon the emperor, his father, published an edict commanding all his subjects, upon great penalties, to break the smaller ends of their eggs. The people so highly resented this law, that our histories tell us there have been six rebellions raised on that account; wherein one emperor lost his life, and another his crown. These civil commotions were constantly fomented by the monarchs of Blefuscu; and when they were quelled, the exiles always fled for refuge to that empire. It is computed that eleven thousand persons have at several times suffered death rather than submit to break their eggs at the smaller end. Many hundred large volumes have been published upon this controversy, but the books of the Big-endians have been long forbidden, and the whole party rendered incapable by law of holding employments. During the course of those troubles the emperors of Blefuscu did frequently expostulate by their ambassadors, accusing us of making a schism in religion, by offending against a fundamental doctrine of our great prophet Lustrog, in the fifty-fourth chapter of the Blundecral (which is their Alcoran). . . Now the Big-endian exiles have

found so much credit in the Emperor of Blefuscu's court, and so much private assistance and encouragement from their party here at home, that a bloody war has been carried on between the two empires for six-and-thirty moons with various success; during which time we have lost forty capital ships, and a much greater number of smaller vessels, together with thirty thousand of our best seamen and soldiers, and the damage received by the enemy is reckoned to be somewhat greater than ours."

It is not hard to see the likeness here; to read for Lilliput, England, and for Blefuscu, France; to recognize Charles I. as the emperor who lost his life, and James II. as the emperor who lost his throne, as the result of plotting to re-establish Catholicism in England.

Born into a corrupt and contentious age, surrounded by war, low diplomatic intrigue, fierce religious persecution, utter bankruptcy of political ideals and decadence of morals, it is easy to make out a strong case for the influence of social environment upon the writings of Swift. The spectacle of life in Swift's days was enough to inspire pessimism; but other minds articulate in that age did not acquire the black view of Swift; witness the tranquil prose, the peaceful atmosphere, the quietly humorous episodes of Addison's *Sir Roger de Coverley Papers*. While the state of affairs influenced Swift, and events of the period are echoed in his writings (I speak here of *Gulliver's Travels*, not of his political pamphlets, which were of course entirely devoted to the discussion of current events), his reaction to things was intensely personal and characteristic of no other order of intellect; and his re-

bellious and morose nature would incline him to misanthropy under any but the most favorable circumstances. The personal influence cannot be left out in any adequate consideration of Swift.

Still, when we consider the age of Swift, there is ample evidence to enable us to understand why Swift, in *Gulliver's Travels*, makes the King of Brobdingnag observe, after Gulliver has recounted to him the customs and general scheme of life followed by the outer world of humanity, that "the bulk of your natives appear to me to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the face of the earth." With the same evidence before us, we can also comprehend the source of Swift's philosophy as expressed in a letter to his friend, Dr. Sheridan: "Expect no more from man than such an animal is capable of, and you will every day find my description of the Yahoos more resembling. You should think and deal with every man as a villain, without calling him so, or flying from him or valuing him less. This is an old true lesson." It is true that Swift did not actually regard all men as villains. Writing to Pope, he says: "If the world had but a dozen Arbuthnots in it, I would burn my travels." But in this reflection there is small comfort!

II.

About Swift's childhood and youth there is a definiteness that is in welcome contrast to certain obscure passages of his later life. He was born November 30, 1667, at 7 Hoey's Court, Dublin; his father, steward of the King's Inns, died seven months before the birth of Jonathan. Swift's mother, Abigail Erick, was a woman of commonplace though sound character, and seems to have had a singularly placid disposition of which her son did not inherit the least trace. Jonathan's grandfather, Thomas Swift, was a clergyman, who married Elizabeth Dryden, a niece of the poet Dryden's grandfather. In the rebellion against Charles I., Thomas Swift took the losing side, supporting the unfortunate monarch. He had ten sons and four daughters; a younger son, Jonathan, became the father of the great satirist; the eldst son, Godwin, was a prominent attorney and speculator.

This uncle was also what might be called a marrying man, having taken unto himself four wives, three of whom were wealthy. He finally lost his fortune, which was to prove a grievous misfortune to young Jonathan, then a student at college and depending upon the bounty of his uncle Godwin; it is interesting to note, too, that Godwin Swift, in his last days, exhibited the same melancholy loss of intellect that overtook his famous nephew.

Swift bitterly resented the fate that had chosen Ireland for his birthplace; he never

ceased to hate and loathe that country. In a short account of his life written by him, he says "that he felt the consequences of that (his parents') marriage, not only through the whole course of his education, but during the greater part of his life."* He always asserted himself an Englishman, and it was a lifelong sorrow that he could not permanently locate in England. "I happened," he said, "by a perfect accident to be born here, and thus I am a Teague, or an Irishman, or what people please."

When he was a year old, Swift's nurse, leaving for her home in Whitehaven, kidnapped him, out of pure affection, and took him with her to England. He remained with his nurse three years. She taught him carefully and with considerable success, as he was able to read the Bible before he was five years old.

Swift's mother was poor, hardly able to bring up her child, and it was fortunate that his uncle Godwin could undertake his maintenance and education. The mother returning to Leicester, her native place, his uncle Godwin placed Jonathan, at the age of six, at school in Kilkenney. Here the witty playwright, Congreve, was Swift's schoolmate. At Trinity College, Dublin (where Laurence Sterne studied a generation later) Swift continued his education, entering the college on April 24, 1682. A cousin, Thomas Swift, matriculated at the same time.

Swift, like many other great spirits, was not

*This account is written in the third person, and covers also the Dean's ancestry.

uniformly diligent in his studies. He took what he wanted, and let the rest go. Let him speak for himself of his attitude toward the curriculum:

"By the ill-treatment of his nearest relations he was so discouraged and sunk in his spirits that he too much neglected his academic studies, for some parts of which he had no great relish by nature, and turned himself to reading history and poetry, so that when the time came for taking his degree of Bachelor of Arts, although he had lived with great regularity and due observance of the statutes, he was stopped of his degree for dullness and insufficiency, and at last hardly admitted in a manner little to his credit, which is called in that college speciali gratia."

Swift's negligence in the study of philosophy was due to his impatience with the intricate syllogistic forms that philosophic reasoning took in that day. Upon the occasion of one examination, he is said to have told the professors that he found himself able to reason very well without syllogisms; a view in which we can heartily concur. It was this kind of logic that Swift ridiculed so mercilessly in his unforgettable description of the Academy of Lagado; and in his description of the floating island, another passage in *Gulliver*, he derides the subject of mathematics, for which he had an equal aversion.

There is nothing very dramatic or unusual in Swift's college days. He perpetrated small infractions of the rules; refused to attend chapel, absented himself from the nightly roll call, and loafed about the town more than was permitted. He and his cousin Thomas were put under censure for "notorious neglect of

duties and frequenting 'the town.'" The most significant anecdote of Swift at college is that which presents him as one of the leaders in a minor rebellion of the students; they not only refused to heed the commands of the junior Dean of the college, but spoke insultingly of the Dean. The climax of this offense came on Swift's twenty-first birthday (November 30, 1688), when the recalcitrant students had their degrees suspended and Swift and another, being the most conspicuous sinners, were forced to kneel publicly to the Dean and beg his pardon.

Swift's moral life was regular at college, as it was throughout his career. He had financial troubles, however, that made him exceedingly bitter. Perhaps he blamed his uncle Godwin unduly for his close circumstances in the last college days; this uncle had not only lost most of his fortune, but had suffered the far greater loss of his mental powers, so that the diminishing extent of his charity is easily explained. Once Swift was asked: "Was it not your uncle Godwin who educated you?" "Yes," replied Swift, "he gave me the education of a dog." "Then you have not the gratitude of a dog," was the retort. It is not hard to understand how a proud, sensitive nature like Swift's was irked by years of enforced dependence; and charity, we know, is seldom gracious, it generally humiliates and often degrades the recipient.

His uncle Godwin's son, Willoughby, was more generous to Swift. Assistance in deed of a substantial kind came from this cousin, prosperously settled in Lisbon, at a time when

young Jonathan was greatly in need of it. While standing at the window of his room one day, in most dejected spirits, with nearly empty pockets, Swift saw a sailor on the college grounds, evidently seeking his way. Thought he: What good fortune if that should be a messenger with a present for me from my cousin Willoughby. This proved to be the case. Finding Swift's rooms, the sailor handed him a bag of money, with his cousin's compliments, that represented Swift's greatest fortune to date. When the sailor declined the offer of money for his services, Swift heard him distinctly and thrust the precious bag into his pocket. His state of dependence, and his slender and uncertain subsistence as a result, impressed deeply upon Swift the value of money and he was all his life subsequently the strictest economist. Later in life he became quite miserly; yet he was not ungenerous, being indeed noted when Dean of St. Patrick's for his unique system of charity. He established a fund of five hundred pounds for loaning money to worthy tradesmen and citizens, the loans to be repaid in weekly installments; the money was loaned out again as fast as it was repaid; no interest was charged; but Swift was careful to bestow this aid only upon those who could give the best security, the fund was watched scrupulously and those who failed to pay up regularly were given prompt attention. Swift also dispensed charity in many other ways, and a number of poor old women of Dublin thanked the great Dean for timely help. It is said by Sheridan (son of Swift's friend)

that Swift, when he got out of debt and was assured a fair income, divided that income into three equal parts: one part he devoted to his own living expense, the second part was laid aside for his old age, while the third part was dispensed in the form of charity.

III.

At the end of 1688, when James II. was forced off the throne and out of the country, and William and Mary began their joint reign, there was a great exodus from Ireland into England. Ireland was plunged into a most turbulent state by this sudden political change, and English residents in Ireland were in a bad position, insurgents being abroad in formidable numbers. Swift, his college course completed, without funds or prospects, joined the flight to England. For a time he stayed with his mother in Leicester. He couldn't stay here indefinitely, however, as his mother was unable to do more than afford him a temporary hospitality. Besides, Swift was eager to get on in the world.

The best opening at hand was that of secretary to Sir William Temple, a distant relative of Swift's mother; Sir William's father had also been a friend in Ireland of Godwin Swift. Sir William had been a diplomat, a graceful if not very forceful figure, who had avoided the hot and dangerous disputes of the times and managed to save his skin as well as his honor. He was a personal friend of William of Orange,

and that ruler offered him the post of Secretary of State,* which, however, Sir William refused, preferring to live a quiet life, of a somewhat literary tinge, at his excellent estate of Moor Park, not far from London. Sir William had the tastes of a simple yet refined country gentleman. He had a magnificent garden, and was a considerable amateur of horticulture. He wrote, in a polished and spiritless style, mildly reflective memoirs and philosophic treatises. He was not much of a partisan, had no intense convictions, looked upon life with rather indolent, unexcited eyes. He was not without a gentle egotism, which seems to have manifested itself in a somewhat paternalistic attitude toward young Swift.**

Swift first went to Sir William Temple at the latter's place at Sheen; the most of his time, however, was spent at Moor Park.

With his imperious disposition, he could never abide inferiority of any kind, no matter how much it might be in the very nature of things. It is amusing, later on, to see him paying back the chief ministers of England for

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*"I am thinking what a veneration we used to have for Sir William Temple because he might have been Secretary of State at fifty; and here is a young fellow hardly thirty in that employment."—Swift's Journal to Stella.

**"Don't you remember how I used to be in pain when Sir William Temple would look cold and out of humour for three or four days, and I used to suspect a hundred reasons? I have plucked up my spirits since then; faith, he spoiled a fine gentleman."—Journal to Stella.

the humble plight he was forced to endure in earlier years with Sir William.*

It was at Sir William's that Swift first met the person who was to be the most intimately connected with his life. Esther Johnson, when Swift first met her, was a girl of eight years. Her mother, a friend of Temple's sister, lived with her daughter in the Moor Park home as a companion to her aristocratic friend. Esther (the famous Stella of the *Journal*) was taught by the youthful Swift, and there developed between them a rare attachment. Also at Moor Park was Mrs. Rebecca Dingley, companion of Stella in her subsequent intimacy

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*"I called at Mr. Secretary's (St. John, Secretary of State), to see what the d——— ailed him on Sunday. I made him a very proper speech . . .; and one thing I warned him of, never to appear cold to me, for I would not be treated like a school-boy; that I had felt too much of that in my life already (referring to Sir William); that I expected every great minister who honoured me with his acquaintance, if he heard or saw anything to my disadvantage, would let me know it in plain words, and not put me in pain to guess by the change or coldness of his countenance or behavior, for it was what I would hardly bear from a crowned head, and I thought no subject's favour was worth it; and that I designed to let my lord keeper and Mr. Harley (Chancellor of the Exchequer) know the same thing, that they might use me accordingly. He took all right; said I had reason; vowed nothing ailed him but sitting up whole nights at business, and one night at drinking; would have had me dine with him and Mrs. Masham's brother, to make up matters. but I would not: I don't know why, but I would not. But indeed I was engaged with my old friend Rollinson; you never heard of him before."—Journal to Stella

with Swift. As Stella received at Sir William Temple's death a comfortable legacy from the diplomat, gossip had it that she was Sir Willam's illegitimate daughter, and Thackeray* makes this assertion unreservedly; but there exists no good proof of it.

One advantage Swift certainly had at Moor Park. He had a great deal of opportunity for study; and he made good use of it, for here he read prodigiously in the classics. He had a special regard for the care of his health, was fond of walking, and, says Deane Swift, grandson of Godwin Swift, Jonathan used to run up a hill, near his study at Temple's, and back every two hours. He was always an enthusiastic walker, and loved to stop at the merry wayside inns and study the simple life. He made one walking trip from Farnham to London—thirty-eight miles; that he loved walking as a reflective pastime, had the true loitering spirit of the genuine walker, is evidenced by his project of a walking trip, on which he proposed to go at the rate of only ten miles a day. He practiced boating, too, and rode horseback. No doubt delicate health prompted this special heed to exercise. Early in his residence at Moor Park, he had a fit of illness, due to over-eating of fruit, and it was to this that he ascribed the spells of giddiness that came upon him with increasing frequency and severity as he grew in years. Indeed, after a year with Sir William, Swift returned to Ireland, thinking it would improve his

*In his "British Humorists."

health. He soon returned, now, it seems, more appreciated by Sir William. The latter helped him to go to Oxford, for his M. A. degree, which he obtained in 1692. What promised better still, was that Sir William recommended Swift to King William, who often visited the diplomat in his retreat at Moor Park. This did not gain Swift anything, however. It is true that the king offered Swift a captaincy of horse; and taught him how to eat asparagus properly.*

Swift was to advise ministers in his youth, as he did in later days, but not so successfully. When the king and his chief minister came at a critical point in parliamentary affairs to Moor Park for a consultation with Sir William Temple, Swift was sent back with them to explain certain matters; although, by his own account, he was "well versed in English history," and had reasoning powers beyond his twenty-five years, the youth did not have the pride of seeing the statesmen follow his advice.

During this period at Moor Park, Swift tried his hand at poetry. One of his verses, ad-

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*Faulkner, the Dublin printer, once told of dining with Swift, and asking for a second helping of asparagus, being told by Swift to finish what he had on his plate. "What, sir, eat my stalks?" he exclaimed. "Ay, sir," Swift replied, "King William always ate his stalks." "And were you," Faulkner was asked, "blockhead enough to obey him?" "Yes," said Faulkner, "and if you had dined with Dean Swift tete-a-tete you would have been obliged to eat your stalks, too!"

dressed to his muse, describes his unhappy temperament:

To thee I owe that fatal bent of mind,
Still to unhappy, restless thoughts inclined;
To thee what oft I vainly strive to hide,
That scorn of fools, by fools mistook for pride;
From thee, whatever virtue takes its rise,
Grows a misfortune, or becomes a vice.

As a poet, Swift never achieved greatness, though he was noted for a certain aptness that is characteristic; while having none of the vividness of phrase, splendor of imagination or passionate strength of emotion that is found in great poetry, most of his verses are easily read and they show the singular precision in choice of language that distinguished him—displaying, too, his ever-present powers of satire. His verses on his own death are exceedingly clever; his longer poem, *The Beasts' Confession* is carefully done and is highly praised for its unerring satire. In foretelling in verse the reception of his death, he writes that

Poor Pope will grieve a month, and Gay
A week, and Arbuthnot a day;
St. John himself will scarce forbear
To bite his pen and drop a tear;
The rest will give a shrug and cry,
"'Tis pity, but we all must die!"

And this verse is delightful:

My female friends, whose tender hearts
Have better learned to act their parts,
Receive the news in doleful dumps:
"The Dean is dead: (Pray what is trumps?)
Then, Lord have mercy on his soul!
(Ladies, I'll venture for the vole.)

Six deans, they say, must bear the pall:
(I wish I knew what king to call.)
Madam, your husband will attend
The funeral of so good a friend."
"No, madam, 'tis a shocking sight:
And he's engaged tomorrow night:
My Lady Club will take it ill,
If he should fail her at quadrille.
He loved the Dean——(I lead a heart),
But dearest friends, they say, must part.
His time was come: he ran his race:
We hope he's in a better place."

He ends this unique poem with this thrust:

"He gave the little wealth he had
To build a house for fools and mad;
And showed by one satiric touch
No nation needed it so much—"*

The very long poem, *Cadenus and Vanessa*, should by all means be read, as it tells the story of the strange love affair between Swift and Miss Hester Vanhomrigh, known as Vanessa because of the title of this poem. Another good thing is his *Advice to the Grub Street Verse Makers*. He tells them to have their verses printed, send them to Pope for use as copy paper, then sell them to the publisher as their own. This poem owes its point to the fact that Pope would write on anything that came to hand; he scribbled his translation of Homer (the original copy of which is in the British Museum) on the covers of letters, much of it between the lines of the letters.

Far more important than his early poetical attempts, are two powerful prose sketches

*Swift left his wealth to found an asylum.

which Swift wrote while at Moor Park, and which showed the direction of his genius: *The Tale of a Tub* and *The Battle of the Books*. The former sketch was written in 1696, when Swift was 29 years old; the latter sketch was written in 1697. Neither sketch was published until 1704. Swift was curiously indifferent to fame as well as profit in his writings. The only profit he ever received from any writing of his was from *Gulliver's Travels*, which brought him two hundred pounds, and this, Swift himself said, was due to "Pope's prudent management." Swift did Pope an even better turn. The incident is told in the diary of Bishop Kennett (the date is 1713), who describes Swift among the courtiers, at the seat of power, in the days of his greatest influence; the entire passage, the most realistic glimpse of Swift as a wielder of power and dispenser of favors, may as well be quoted here:

"Swift came into the coffee-house and had a bow from everybody but me. When I came into the ante-chamber to wait before prayers, Dr. Swift was the principal man of talk and business, and acted as Minister of Requests. He was soliciting the Earl of Arran to speak to his brother, the Duke of Ormond, to get a chaplain's place established in the garrison of Hull for Mr. Fiddes, a clergyman in that neighborhood, who had lately been in jail, and published sermons to pay fees. He was promising Mr. Thorold to undertake with my Lord Treasurer that according to his petition he should obtain a salary of 200 pounds per annum, as minister of the English Church at Rotterdam. He stopped F. Gwynne, Esq., going in with the red bag to the Queen, and told him aloud he had something to say to him from my Lord Treasurer. He talked

with the son of Dr. Davenant to be sent abroad, and took out his pocketbook and wrote down several things as memoranda to do for him. He turned to the fire, and took out his gold watch, and telling him the time of day, complained it was very late. A gentleman said, 'It was too fast.' 'How can I help it,' says the Doctor, 'if the courtiers give me a watch that won't go right?' Then he instructed a young nobleman that the best poet in England was Mr. Pope (a Papist), who had begun a translation of Homer into English verse, for which, he said, he must have them all subscribe. 'For,' says he, 'the author shall not begin to print till I have a thousand guineas for him.' Lord Treasurer, after leaving the Queen, came through the room, beckoning Dr. Swift to follow him; both went off just before prayers."

This is a great picture—unforgettable—of Swift. A most human touch, too!—the Bishop would not bow to Swift in the coffee-house; and he takes a sly dig at him because Swift, in the ante-chamber in the Queen's palace, after transacting various business, went off with the Lord Treasurer "just before prayers." We are grateful to the Bishop, however, for telling us so much about Dr. Swift—especially for the line about Pope. Swift also took subscriptions in Ireland for Voltaire's *Henriade*, at Voltaire's request. His indifference to profits from his own writings is shown by his giving the copyright of his *Polite Conversations* to a Mrs. Barber, the wife of a Dublin woolen-draper and an abortive poetess.

The Battle of the Books (a satire, as was almost everything Swift wrote) was intended to show the superiority of ancient over modern literature and philosophy. Sir William Temple

had written an essay in favor of the ancients. Swift took Sir William's side of the controversy. He speaks of philosophy as having "borrowed some ungrateful taste of doubts, impertinences and niceties from every age through which it passed," "medley of all ages," with "her face patched over with modern pedantry." He presents an image of the bee caught in the spider's web in the library. The spider is seen as a figure of the moderns, who spin their webs of learning out of themselves; while the bee, representing the ancients, gets the pure stuff of nature. All the moderns have to show is "wrangling and satire, much of a nature with the spider's poison, which, however they pretend to spit wholly out of themselves, is improved by the same arts, by feeding upon the insects and vermin of the age." The ancients "profess to nothing of our own beyond our wings and our voice; that is to say, our flights and our language. For the rest, whatever we have got has been by infinite labor and research, and ranging through every corner of nature; the difference is that, instead of dirt and poison, we have rather chosen to fill our hives with honey and wax, thus furnishing mankind with the two noblest of things, which are sweetness and light." The poet Dryden (Swift's cousin) is pictured in a meeting with Virgil, whom he translated; Dryden wears a helmet "nine times too large for the head, which appeared situate far in the hinder part, even like the lady in the lobster, or like a mouse under a canopy of state, or like a shrivelled bean within the penthouse

of a modern periwig; and the voice was suited to the visage, sounding weak and remote." Swift swung the axe right and left in *The Battle of the Books*, appeared truly in the full confident stride of his satire.

The Tale of a Tub is a greater sketch, which ridicules the doctrinal disputes of religion. Swift, late in life, glancing over it, exclaimed, "God, what a genius I had when I wrote that!" Swift, a Church of England man, is here taking a sharp fall out of the Catholics and Dissenters, and he afterwards insisted that he wrote it with the object of upholding the true religion by poking fun at the false brands of theology; nevertheless, it reveals a mocking spirit that indicates more than passingly a fundamental attitude of general skepticism. Certainly the dignitaries of Swift's own church could not be pleased by the picture of man as a mere sartorial sham, who if he "be trimmed up with a gold chain, and a red gown, and a white rod, and a pert look it is called the Lord Mayor; if certain ermines and furs be placed in a certain position, we style them a judge; and so an apt conjunction of lawn and black satin we entitle a bishop."

In this tale Swift puts forward three brothers, Peter, Martin and Jack to represent the Catholics, the Church of England adherents, and the dissenting Puritans. Each is left a new coat by their father, who tells in his will explicitly how they must wear the coats. Finally growing enamored of wealth, ambition and pride, in the form of three ladies, they begin to invent subtle excuses for breaking

the will and altering the style of the coats. They desire to have shoulder-knots on the coats, so they pick the letters in the will that spell "s-h-o-u-l-d-e-r-k-n-o-t-s"; not finding a "k," they decide that "c" will pass for the missing letter. They must have gold lace; and they pretend to recollect that their father's man had told another person (so the latter said) that the father would suggest gold lace for his sons if they could afford it. The eldest brother, Peter, helps matters beautifully by dragging out a codicil, which justifies them in adding flame-colored satin to their apparel. The will commands against the use of a silver fringe in downright terms; but the brothers, not to be daunted, dig up the fact that the word which means a silver fringe also means a broomstick. This minute temporizing proceeds apace, until at last Peter grows big-headed and assumes a lordship over the other two brothers. Later the two brothers, Martin and Jack, disagree. So goes this "wild book," as Dr. Johnson termed it. While Swift's derision is here mainly directed at Peter and Jack—Catholicism and Puritanism,—and he aims no cruel shafts at Martin (the Church of England), it is obvious that the piece has a strikingly irreverent, essentially skeptical tone, that is not comfortable to any theology or theologian. "Imagine *The Tale of Tub* to be read by Bishop Butler and by Voltaire, who called Swift a Rabelais *perfectionne*," says Leslie Stephen. "Can any one doubt that the believer would be scandalized and the scoffer find himself in a thoroughly congenial element? Would not any

believer shrink from the use of such weapons even though directed against his enemies?"

It appears that certain high churchmen, even of Swift's creed, doubted Swift's piety, as a result of *The Tale of a Tub*. This lack of confidence in his religious sincerity kept Swift from being made a bishop a number of years later, when, but for this book that was produced against him, his chances would have been good, as he was then at the top of his power as the adviser of Harley and St. John, Queen Anne's ministers. But Sharpe, Archbishop of York, showed the Queen a copy of *The Tale of a Tub*, pointing out that it was not safe to make a bishop out of a man who could write such an insidious thing. This, together with the personal enmity of the Duchess of Somerset, the Queen's favorite, whose red hair Swift had ridiculed under the name of "Carrots" in a satire, cost Swift the coveted place.

It seems difficult to reconcile the staunch Church of England views of Swift with his all-pervading skepticism. It is true that on all occasions he stoutly upheld the views of the Established Church, and was given to the most violent abuse of all who questioned this creed. In all outward respects, he was a solid and unshakable Anglican, a doughty theologian. Yet his general view of life was anything but religious; he was, in his attitude of mind, always thoroughly skeptical. His writings are full of irritants to the pious. He kept company, was indeed fast friends, with

skeptics and free-thinkers.* May it not be that Swift, viewing life as all a sham and a delusion, regarding truth as a will-o'-the-wisp, philosophic speculation as a futile bore, looked upon a formal religious creed as offering a sound footing, as providing a useful check to the vanity and folly of men? On the other hand, his unbending church policy may have been nothing more than vigorous partisanship, a thing that Swift accepted as his own and defended as such out of personal feeling more than well-reasoned adherence. Certainly when Swift attached himself to any man or party or belief, he stood up for his choice with unexampled vehemence, and not always with painstaking logic; some of his pamphlets on current affairs show more of a desire to sustain a point than to ascertain the pure truth. It is worthy of note that when a poor clergyman he forsook his charge of Laracor for long periods, while he occupied himself with politics in England. It is significant, too, that Swift was much criticised, as he himself acknowledges, for not associating with men of

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*"I know of few things more conclusive as to the sincerity of Swift's religion than his advice to poor John Gay to turn clergyman, and look out for a seat on the Bench. Gay, the author of 'The Beggar's Opera'—Gay, the wildest of the wits about town—it was this man that Jonathan Swift advised to take orders—to invest in a cassock and bands—just as he advised him to husband his shillings and put his thousand pounds out at interest."—Thackeray, in "British Humorists."

the cloth;* he preferred the society of politicians, writers and wits, among whom were some of the pronounced skeptics of the day. For a clergyman, Swift had a very free pen; what would he not have written had he been attached to another calling than that of the clergy?

* * *

In 1694 Swift left Sir William Temple, with not the best of spirits on either side. In June of that year he writes to his cousin in Lisbon: "I left Sir W. Temple a month ago, just as I foretold it you; and everything happened exactly as I guessed. He was extremely angry I left him; and yet would not oblige himself any further than upon my good behavior, nor would promise anything firmly to me at all; so that everybody judged I did best to leave him." Apparently Swift had placed little faith in Sir William's promises of future help, and it is evident that their relations must have been strained before Swift made the open break. He says elsewhere that he thinks his employer is deliberately backward about getting him preferment because his secretary is too valuable for him to lose. When in Ireland, Swift discovered the necessity of getting some recommendations from his former employer and wrote what must have been to him an irksome appeal to the generosity of Sir William, who graciously complied. On October

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*"A clergyman of special note
For shunning others of his coat;
Which made his brethren of the gown
Take care betimes to run him down."

28, 1694, Swift was ordained a deacon, and on January 15, 1695, he was made a priest; receiving the prebend of Kilroot, which brought him one hundred pounds a year.

Swift did not stay long at Kilroot. It was out of the world, and there was nothing there to really interest him. He returned to Sir William Temple in May, 1696, and in March, 1698, he gave up his living at Kilroot. This latter period of service with Sir William was the most agreeable and dignified of Swift's association with the diplomat.

At this period, Swift was employed in helping prepare Sir William's memoirs and letters. To Swift was given the privilege of bringing out these works after the author's death. Sir William died on January 26, 1699. He left one hundred pounds to Swift, in addition to the commission to publish his writings, which brought him several hundred pounds. Swift had a real affection for Sir William Temple. He describes him as a man "full of sense and virtue" and upon his death said that with him died "all that was good and amiable among men."

Although Sir William had assured Swift that he would receive preferment from King William, this prospect entirely failed. He dedicated Temple's works to the King, and wrote a petition to the King, which was not handed to him by the courtier to whom Swift gave it. Giving up all hope of advancement in this quarter, he took the positions of chaplain and secretary to Lord Berkeley, who was going to Ireland as a Chief Justice. Arriving in Dub-

lin, Swift was deprived of his secretaryship, through the influence of one Bush, who obtained the position for himself, representing it as not a fit duty for a clergyman. As Lord Berkeley had promised Swift to give him the next good church opening that offered itself, the latter soon reminded him of this promise by applying for the deanery of Derry; but Bush had been bribed, with a thousand pounds, to confer this rich plum upon another applicant. So Swift left the Lord and his secretary, exclaiming, "God confound you both for a couple of scoundrels!" He could not, however, afford to be utterly independent; and in February, 1700, he accepted a living at Laracor, a village about twenty miles from Dublin and near the town of Trim. He also got two other small livings and a prebend in the Cathedral of St. Patrick's, which gave him an income of two hundred and thirty pounds a year.

At this time Swift made an end to a youthful love affair (the only one in which he appears to have made anything like eager advances) with Miss Jane Waring, sister of a school friend. Swift had formerly urged Miss Waring to marry him, but the girl had refused; she argued her bad health and Swift's low fortunes. When he was settled at Laracor, Miss Waring wrote suggesting that they could now marry. Swift offered to fulfill their marriage agreement; but the letter he wrote was so sharp and critical in tone that the girl, out of wounded self-respect, pleased Swift by dropping the affair; Swift condemned her severely for living with her family, which he

branded as worthless and in offering to take her, stated that all he asked was "cleanliness" in her person and "competency" in her fortune.

It was shortly after this episode (in 1701) that Esther Johnson (who for convenience will be called Stella hereafter—the name Swift gave to her in his celebrated *Journal*) came to Swift in Ireland. Sir William Temple's legacy to her had been in the shape of a small farm in that country. She and Mrs. Dingley, now her companion, could live more cheaply in Ireland, Swift wrote. The ladies lodged themselves at Trim. Swift was now thirty-three years of age, Stella twenty. There was talk, of course; but the whole of their relations seems to have been one of complete innocence—of deep tenderness rather than passionate love. At least this was true of Swift. Stella's letters to Swift have not been preserved, and nothing is directly known of the state of her feelings. It is assumed, with much color, that she loved Swift and was deeply grieved by the limits he placed upon their association. She had a revealing fit of jealousy of Vanessa on one memorable occasion. She seems, too, to have induced Swift to marry her, secretly, in 1716. There is no genuine proof of the marriage; it was believed to have occurred by several of Swift's most intimate friends, notably by Dr. Sheridan and by Dr. Delany, who, says Leslie Stephen, is "the best contemporary authority" on Swift; but Mrs. Dingley, Mrs. Brent, Swift's housekeeper in his last years, and Stella's executors denied the marriage, ac-

cording to the testimony of a clergyman, Dr. Lyon, who was one of Swift's guardians after he lost his mind. Married or not, Swift and Stella certainly did not live, as the phrase goes, "as man and wife." They were never together save in the presence of a third person; and in 1726, two years before Stella's death, Swift writes to a friend that he has not seen her in a morning "these dozen years, except once or twice in a journey."

At best the relationship is mystifying. Why did Swift maintain this attitude toward Stella? Why was he so careful to have some one else present when he enjoyed her company? Did he desire merely to save her reputation or did he fear that, alone, their relationship might threaten to pass the bounds he had set for it? What significance is there in the fact that Swift, when a young man, setting down resolutions to be observed in his old age, included the caution to have nothing to do with children, "nor to let them come near me hardly"? Swift was a prudent man, it is true, and he often advanced economy, or inability of fortune, as a reason for not marrying. But Stella had money of her own; and Swift's own fortune became comfortable at an age when he could still have embraced the natural state of marriage if he had been so inclined. If he was married to Stella, why did he deny her the love she probably grieved to have withheld? Vanessa had a fortune; so money could have been no bar to union with her. And marriage aside, why did Swift, who was very attractive to women and had charming relations with

many members of that sex, never have a complete love affair? He was subject to a vertigo that dated from the Moor Park period; and he seems to have had premonitions of his loss of intellect. But, while this might explain his failure to marry and have children, it does not clear up the question of his peculiar abstinence from sexual relations.* The mystery deepens the more one speculates. It is suggested that he was constitutionally incapable of the emotion of love. But what was the precise nature of this incapability we do not know; nor is it placed in any clearer light by the account of *The Closing Years of Dean Swift*, published by Sir William Wilde (the father of Oscar Wilde) when the remains of Swift and Stella were temporarily exhumed in the course of repairs to St. Patrick's Cathedral, in Dublin. This specialized study follows, through Swift's writings, the progress of his ill-health; and Dr. Wilde found that the skull of the Dean gave evidence of "diseased action" of his brain, indicating a tendency toward "cerebral congestion."

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*It has been significantly observed that Swift's writings, while unusually free in their style and filled with coarse allusions, contain no reference to sex. It is assumed that had Swift been sex-conscious, he would have shown it in his writings. The theory is that Swift did not suppre sex, but that he had no feeling about it. It is remarkable, too, that Swift, though his writings show considerable coarseness, had an active aversion for coarseness in conversation.

IV.

The village of Laracor had no more attraction for Swift than had Kilroot; nor could frequent trips to Dublin compensate his seclusion. England always drew Swift. There was the proper field of his ambitions. He continually strove to realize his deep longing to obtain a position that would enable him to make his home in England. He did not wish to die in Ireland, "like a poisoned rat in a hole." Out of the ten years from 1700 to 1710, Swift spent more than four, at different periods, in London.* He easily made his way in the society of the great capital. He had, of course, connections through Sir William Temple; letters of introduction from the Irish Viceroys; and he knew Congreve, who had been his schoolfellow. A man of his intellectual powers and striking personal qualities—learned, imperious, witty and with a high degree of expressiveness—could not fail to find a place. His ability was signally impressed upon London by the appearance in 1701 of a *Discourse on the Dissensions in Athens and Rome.* This pamphlet was an attack upon the attitude of the House of Commons in obstructing the policies of the King and his ministers. The House had impeached the Whig

*"He was in England from April to September in 1701, from April to November in 1702, from November, 1703, till May, 1704, for an uncertain part of 1705, and again for over fifteen months from the end of 1707 till the beginning of 1709."—Leslie Stephen in his "Life of Swift."

ministers; and this paper, coming at such an opportune time and proving highly effective, brought Swift to the interested attention of the leading Whig politicians. He became intimate with the leaders of this party; and they held out to him promises of advancement —of a really worth-while place in the church, which Swift was always ambitious to secure. Although Swift was a Whig in political principle, he was a stout Church of England man and did not always agree with the Whig leaning in church matters, which was perceptibly toward the Dissenters. Over one bill, passed by the Tory House of Commons and which the Whig leaders urged Swift to combat in a pamphlet, he hesitated long. The bill was intended to abolish the practice of Dissenters qualifying for office by observing the sacrament according to the Church of England—mere lip service—yet actually remaining opposed to the Church. Swift naturally approved any measure aimed at the Dissenters; but, moved by the assurance of the Whig leaders that the defeat of the bill could not be injurious to his Church, Swift at last decided to write against it; he was spared this necessity, as the bill was killed while he was making up his mind. Swift's influence with the politicians then at the top brought him back to England in 1707 (he had of course been back and forth during these years) as a representative of the church. Certain church revenues, that had been diverted into his own pockets by Henry VIII., had been restored in England by Queen Anne; Swift hoped to secure the reversion of

this revenue to the church in Ireland as well. He had a personal disappointment at the outset; the bishopric of Waterford, being vacant. Somers, not in office but the acknowledged leader of the Whigs, tried to get the place for Swift, but failed.

Loyal to his church, Swift pressed the matter of the revenues upon Godolphin, but that minister put him off; and Swift, growing more discouraged, was at last to fail in this as he had failed in his personal interests. Wharton, violent anti-churchman, was appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. The Whigs, with their position strongly secured, in control of Parliament, still did not display the proper zeal in behalf of Swift's church mission. Indeed, Swift's unwavering sentiments in church affairs obstructed his chance of advancement. The Whig party was strongly anti-church in color, the organ of the middle class and the Dissenters; so Swift, while politically a Whig, from his early association with Sir William Temple and his belief in the Revolution against the Stuart dynasty, was essentially a Tory in his religious views. He not being able to throw his opinions fully into the scale in behalf of the Whigs, the latter were naturally suspicious of him. His *Sentiments of a Church of England Man*, published at this time, defined clearly his church position. This pamphlet was published anonymously, according to the custom of the time, largely to avoid the prosecution that was ever imminent; but, while serving a legal purpose, this anonymity was often a very thin mask and there is no doubt

that the Whig leaders were sufficiently apprised of Swift's antipathy to the religious policy of the party. In March, 1709, Swift had to admit finally both his personal and ecclesiastical failure with the Whig powers; not even his friendship with Addison, who was then secretary to Lord Wharton in Dublin, was a sufficient influence to gain his ends. Weary and disgusted and suffering from the giddiness that was giving him cruel pain he retired to Laracor in a spirit of utter disillusionment.

In 1705 Swift had become quite friendly with Addison, of whom he once said in a famous phrase that he "had virtue enough to give reputation to an age." How highly Addison regarded Swift is attested by a superscription in his *Travels in Italy*: "To Jonathan Swift, the most agreeable companion, the truest friend, and the greatest genius of his age, this work is presented by his most humble servant the author." On this friendship, Leslie Stephen comments finely:

"The pair formed a close friendship, which is honourable to both. For it proves that if Swift was imperious, and Addison a little too fond of the adulation of 'wits and Templars,' each could enjoy the society of an intellectual equal. They met, we may fancy, like absolute kings, accustomed to the incense of courtiers, and not inaccessible to its charms; and yet glad at times to throw aside state and associate with each other without jealousy. Addison, we know, was most charming when talking to a single companion, and Delany repeats Swift's statement that, often as they spent their evenings together, they never wished for a third."

Swift was indeed so agreeably inclined toward Addison that he good-humoredly permitted him to "blot out four score lines, add four score and alter four score" in his poem, *Baucis and Philemon.* Swift also became the friend of Richard Steele, whose name is inevitably called up by that of Addison.

There was one literary man of the day who, far from being friendly to Swift, had an active dislike for him and his works. This—not at all surprisingly—was Dr. Johnson, who appears to have been so hard to please and who was a severe critic of Sterne. Boswell relates that he once asked the Doctor if Swift had personally offended him and was told that he had not. When he was writing his *Lives of the Poets,* Johnson was offered material about Swift by Deane Swift, grandson of Godwin, but the offer was ignored; the Doctor needed little but his own prejudice as material when he wrote of any one whom he did not like.

V.

Now—from 1710 to 1714—comes the highest point in Swift's life. We have seen him retire to Laracor, a disappointed man, after the refusal of the Whigs to help him or his church. His restless ambition was still unsatisfied. It has been observed how he was constantly endeavoring to get a good place in the church. He wished to be financially independent, to have competence and leisure; and he desired a haven in England, which he always regarded as his natural home. One of the things against

which Swift's spirit ceaselessly struggled was the ill-luck that condemned him to stay in Ireland. Somewhere he says that "all my endeavors from a boy to distinguish myself were only for want of a great title and fortune, that I might be used like a lord by those who have an opinion of my parts; whether right or wrong is no great matter; and so the reputation of great wit or learning does the office of a blue riband or of a coach and six horses." Thackeray, in his lecture on Swift, has dwelt with strange emphasis upon this bit of irony. It might be taken soberly if Swift were a man of dull literal wit, who never laughed at himself or others, but reading it with a smile that recognizes the blending of truth and satire, we can see in it a shrewd observation of society. Wit and learning could and did make for some men positions of social eminence equal to that accorded others with title and fortune. Swift had wit and learning, and he was not without ambition. When there came a chance to use his powers to the full, he was ready for it.

In 1710 the Whigs were turned out of power. Harley (afterwards the Earl of Oxford) and St. John (who became Viscount Bolingbroke) were now the ruling ministers. Swift came to London in September. He was still a Whig to the world. Whatever his private thoughts, he had not openly deserted this party. Both parties immediately began angling for his allegiance. His old friends, the Whigs, exhibited the customary cordiality of those out of power to one who can help them get back into power. They had not given Swift a single small

favor while they were in power; and now they hastened to make explanations and excuses. They were "ravished to see me," and made him "clumsy apologies," Swift writes to Stella. Lord Halifax dined him, asked him to drink to the success of the Whigs, but Swift said he would not drink to their success unless he also drank "to their reformation." In those days when political writing had a direct bearing upon the fate of ministries and a good pamphleteer was the most valuable acquisition a party could have, we are prepared to see the Tory ministers making their own flattering advances to Swift. It was of course known that Swift's allegiance to the Whigs was very weak; that he was ripe for a change; and very soon Swift was introduced to Harley "as a discontented person, who was ill used for not being Whig enough." Harley met Swift with extreme friendliness; received him "with the greatest kindness and respect imaginable." The Tories stood in need of a really able writer; afterwards they confided to Swift that he was the only man they had been afraid of and that they had been determined to win him to their side. As Swift had been badly used by the Whigs; as he had never been more than half Whig; and as here was power and honor beckoning to him with friendly hands, it is easy to understand why Swift changed from Whig to Tory.

This period of Swift's life is known to us through the *Journal to Stella*, daily chats addressed to Stella and her companion, Mrs. Dingley. To Stella, Swift writes of his com-

ings and goings, giving her in vivid careless strokes his impressions of men and things; it is a minute record of his movements; yet Swift does not report his interviews with the great men, gives only a flashlight of politics and will dismiss an important situation with a phrase that is, however, quaintly revealing—all of which goes to show that Swift never had any thought of the publication of these casual jottings of his pen. This *Journal* is the most picturesque and whimsical of Swift's writings;* and its importance as giving us a clear

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*A unique thing in the Journal is the "little language" that is used by Swift in his most endearing moods toward Stella. He called himself Pdfr (Podefar) or "Poor dear Foolish Rogue." Stella was Ppt (Poppet). MD means "my dear;" FW, "farewell" or "foolish wenches;" Lele is supposed to mean "truly" or "lazy" or "there, there." This lovely playing with words occurs mostly at the ends of the letters. "So I got into bed," writes Swift, "to write to MD, MD, for we must always write to MD, MD, MD, awake or asleep. . . Go to bed. Help pdfr. Rove pdfr, MD, MD. Nite darling rogues." "I assure it im vely late now; but zis goes to-morrow; and I must have time to converse with my own deerichar MD. Nite de deer Sollahs." Again: "Farewell, dearest hearts and souls, MD. Farewell, MD, MD, MD. FW, FW, FW. ME, ME. Lele, Lele, Lele, Sollahs, Lele." But this is the most charming of all, written in bed: "And now let us come out and see what this saucy, dear letter of MD says. Come out, letter, come out from between the sheets; here it is underneath, and it will not come out. Come out again, I says; so there. Here it is. What says Pdf to me, pray? says it. Come and let me answer for you to your ladies. Hold up your head then like a good letter."

view of him during his most exalted phase, is self-evident.

Swift rapidly came into the greatest intimacy with Harley (Chancellor of the Exchequer, later Lord Treasurer) and St. John (Secretary of State). We see him at once overwhelmed with attentions. Three days after he first meets Harley, he brings up the church revenue matter and the Chancellor gives him the warmest assurances of his favor. He will introduce Swift to St. John; invites him to dine the following Tuesday; and, after a four-hour talk, takes him in a hackney-coach as far as St. James' Coffee House. Harley asks Swift to call on him often, but not at his levee; "that was not a place for friends to meet." "All this is odd and comical!" Swift confides to Stella. "He knew my Christian name very well." With this extraordinary friendliness went genuine deeds. Within a few weeks, Swift's wish is granted with regard to the church revenue. Before long he has reached the heart of intimacy and influence. This transformation from an isolated Irish parson into a distinguished personage did not involve the sacrifice of Swift's dignity or independence. Quite early in the days of his Tory allegiance, he forced his acceptance by the ministers on a dignified and privileged basis. Harley sent him a fifty-pound note for an article. This Swift indignantly rejected and chose to completely break off relations with Harley until the latter apologized, and gave tangible signs of Swift's admission to the inner circle by inviting him to the very private Saturday dinner

at which Harcourt (the Lord Kepper), St. John and Harley engaged in confidential talk. Swift, with a few others, became a regular figure at these dinners. He also dined every Sunday with St. John. "They call me nothing but Jonathan," writes Swift, "and I said I believed they would leave me Jonathan, as they found me." Thus he reminds the ministers that he looks to them for the highest proof of friendship in the form of a church appointment.

A paper had been started by St. John to voice the policies of the new ministry. Of this paper, *The Examiner*, Swift at once took charge. He wrote steadily for this paper (which was a weekly) from November 2, 1710, until June 14, 1711. With Swift writing for it, this party organ quickly became an instrument of unusual power. There were none of the writers of the day who were capable of beating Swift in political controversy. Addison for a time crossed pens with him in *The Whig Examiner;* but Swift dominated the field. His political articles, says Leslie Stephen, "are acts rather than words . . . blows struck in a party contest." He was not striving for literary effect, but for political success. His task was to translate the decisions of the ministers into the language of popular demand. It was of course often convenient to impute the most discreditable, not to say despicable, motives to the other side—and this Swift did without hesitation when it appeared necessary to make his point. But he used careful judgment, and was cautious enough to praise the Duke of Marlborough while at the same time insinuat-

ing that it was self-interest that prompted the popular general to continue the war against France; for this politic handling of Marlborough he was roundly tasked by Lord Rivers, of whom Harley told Swift that if the Lord had his way the ministry "would be blown up in twenty-four hours." Occasionally Swift had recourse to personal attack, which he conducted in remarkable style. He did not let his pen run away with him—did not rave—but kept a composed and plausible countenance; his most crushing denunciations were developed with a deadly-calm and controlled satire. He found his enemy's weak spot and then applied the lash with cool and cruel precision. A most destructive lampoon of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland (Wharton), in which that official was charged with "lying, treachery, atheism, Presbyterianism, debauchery, indecency, shameless indifference to his own reputation and his wife's, the vilest corruption and tyranny in his government,"* closed with the statement: "I neither love nor hate him. If I see him after this is published he will tell me 'that he is damnably mauled'; and then, with the easiest transition in the world, ask about the weather or the time of the day."

Most of Swift's *Examiner* articles dealt with the development of party policy. One of his first tasks was the difficult one of preparing the public mind for peace in the war then waging against France. It was Swift who vigorously urged the course of peace upon the

*Leslie Stephen.

ministry; it was, he insisted, their only hope of staying in power. The war was a successful one for England in that the English armies were winning great victories in the field; Marlborough was the military idol of the hour; but this was a terrific drain upon the country's finances and it was really in the public interest that the war should end. The greatest paper that Swift wrote during this active service in London was his *Conduct of the Allies*, whose masterly arguments produced conviction not only in Parliament but in the country at large. In the *Journal to Stella* under date of February 4, 1711, he says: "The house of commons have this day made many severe votes about our being abused by our allies. Those who spoke, drew all their arguments from my book, and their votes confirm all I wrote. The court had a majority of 150. All agree that it was my book that spirited them to these resolutions. . . . The resolutions . . . are almost quotations from it and would never have passed if that book had not been written." Opposition, however, had developed in the House of Lords; for a time things were in a painfully uncertain state, and Swift writes to Stella that he trembles for the fate of the ministry; but the ministers managed to reach the ear of the Queen and persuade her to create twelve new peers which supplied the majority needed. Simultaneously the Duke of Marlborough was recalled. Peace was now assured and the Tory ministry was more firmly in power. There was, however, an even worse threat to the existence of the min-

istry than Whig opposition or the delicate issue of peace. This was dissension among the ministers themselves, particularly between Harley and St. John. Swift appears frequently in the role of peacemaker between his two friends. In April, 1713, he had been made Dean of St. Patrick's—an unsatisfactory reward for his political services, especially as it meant his living in Ireland. In June he went to Ireland to assume his new duties, but was called back to London in September to mediate the growing difficulties between Harley and St. John. He now engaged in a rather bitter controversy with his old friend Steele. His friendship with both Steele and Addison had been strained a couple of years before (in 1711) and though he continued on civil terms with Addison, the break with Steele became complete. The latter had been dismissed as Gazetteer after an attack on Harley; Swift, interceding, had prevailed upon Harley to be reconciled to Steele, if Steele would make apology; but Steele did not keep the appointment, being persuaded by Addison against it, Swift says, "out of spite." In the *Journal* of December 14, 1710, Swift has this reference to Addison:

"Mr. Addison and I are as different as black and white, and I believe our friendship will go off, by this damned business of party; he cannot bear seeing me fall in so with this ministry; but I love him still as well as ever though we seldom meet."

On January 31, 1711, he writes:

"I went to Mr. Addison's, and dined with him at his lodgings; I had not seen him these three

weeks; we are grown common acquaintance; yet what have not I done for his friend Steele? Mr. Harley reproached me the last time I saw him, that to please me, he would be reconciled to Steele, and had promised and appointed to see him, and that Steele never came. Harrison, whom Mr. Addison recommended to me, I have introduced to the Secretary of State, who has promised me to take care of him; and I have represented Addison himself so to the ministry, that they think and talk in his favour, though they hated him before.—Well, he is now in my debt, and there is an end; and I never had the least obligation to him, and there is another end."

It is to Swift's credit that he was always ready to help his friends through his influence with the ministry. He talked in behalf of Congreve and Rowe; got a foreign secretaryship for Addison's friend Harrison; was active, as we have seen, in the interests of Addison and Steele. He secured appointments for comparatively obscure writers when he had not done anything for himself. When Congreve is in doubt about an appointment, Swift obtains reassurance from Harley and hastens to communicate the news to his friend—"I have made a worthy man easy," he says, "and that is a good day's work." Elsewhere he observes: "I think I am bound in honor and conscience to use all my little credit towards helping forward men of worth in the world." He was the principal mover in founding the Brothers' Club, an organization for the promotion of letters, which was to contain only men of letters and those who might befriend them. Swift was also ambitious to found an academy for "correcting, improving and ascertaining the

English language" and planned to induce the ministers to endow such an institution. The press of political business constantly put it off, Swift himself was too much occupied with party affairs to give it enough attention, and the project never went beyond a mere outline. All this, however, shows Swift's loyalty to his friends and his unselfish desire to advance the cause of literature.*

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The rift widened between Harley and St. John; Swift, friendly to both, would not take sides. Personally, he preferred Harley, a correct and gracious person, not very brilliant and rather colorless in the perspective of history; St. John, we imagine, was a little too given to dissipation to please Swift. But Swift admired the political audacity and energy of

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*A story that belongs to Swift's London days, and shows an amusing side of his character, is that of the Bickerstaff joke. In 1708 one Partridge, a cobbler, had published an almanac giving astrological predictions. Swift, under the name of Isaac Bickerstaff, brought out an almanac, in which he foretold the death of Partridge at 11 p. m., on March 29. The day came, and immediately thereafter a letter appeared, reporting the death of Partridge within four hours of the predicted time. Partridge, in all seriousness, hurried to press with an almanac in which he stoutly declared himself to be alive. Bickerstaff continued to argue that Partridge was in fact dead, alleging that his continued publication of almanacs was no disproof of his death. The wits took it up, and the joke had a merry run. It is said that the Portuguese Inquisition took the thing seriously and condemned the imaginary Bickerstaff to the flames.

St. John rather than the extreme timidity and slowness of Harley; he indeed often complained of the procrastination of the latter. Swift was in retirement in the country, in Berkshire, when Harley finally resigned his place in July, 1714. St. John's supremacy was short-lived. A few days after the resignation of Harley, Queen Anne died. George I. came to the throne, and the Tory ministry, with which Swift had been the powerful favorite, was out in the street.

* * *

Swift had a better opportunity than perhaps any other writer to observe courts and ministers. His final opinion of them is clearly reflected in the satire of *Gulliver's Travels*. In Lilliput, Gulliver is invited by the emperor to see a performance of rope-dancing. Gulliver then explains that

"This diversion is only practiced by those persons who are candidates for great employments and high favor at court. They are trained in this art from their youth, and are not always of noble birth or liberal education. When a great office is vacant, either by death or disgrace (which often happens), five or six of those candidates petition the emperor to entertain his majesty and the court with a dance on the rope; and whoever jumps the highest without falling succeeds in the office. Very often the chief ministers themselves are commanded to show their skill, and to convince the emperor that they have not lost their faculty. Flimnap, the treasurer is allowed to cut a caper on the straight rope, at least an inch higher than any other lord in the whole empire. I have seen him do the summerset several times together, upon a trencher fixed on a rope, which is no thicker than a common packthread in

England. My friend Reldresal, principal secretary for private affairs is, in my opinion, if I am not partial, the second after the treasurer; the rest of the great officers are much upon a par."

Of the emperor of Lilliput, Gulliver observes that "He is taller, by almost the breadth of my nail, than any of his court, which alone is enough to strike an awe into the beholders."

VI.

While writing the affectionate letters that compose the *Journal to Stella*, Swift had become involved with another woman in an affair that was to prove almost equally strange. He first met the family of Mrs. Vanhomrigh, a well-to-do widow, in London in 1708. He chose lodgings, in 1710, near the Vanhomrighs. The oldest daughter, Hester, was seventeen when Swift made her acquaintance. She was distinguished for her liveliness of wit, was an intellectual companion in the best sense of the word. While she went into society, she could find few of the opposite sex who equalled her in mind and could converse on her level. Swift would naturally attract her; his personal charms and attainments, no less than his high political and literary achievements, would intrigue the emotions of a young woman whose admiration flew to mental rather than physical qualifications. In a long poem, *Cadenus and Vanessa*, Swift relates in quite straightforward fashion what is no doubt the plain truth of the progress of this friendship. At first, Swift ap-

pears in the role of friendly tutor to Vanessa. He pays tribute to her mind, is glad to be in the society of a witty and cultivated woman, who moreover accords him all homage, elevates him in his own esteem by hanging upon his slightest word and accepting the guidance of his superior intellect. Swift had no thought of love.

"That innocent delight he took
To see the virgin mind her book
Was but the master's secret joy
In school to hear the finest boy."

These are cold words, if admirable. Vanessa's attitude toward her celebrated mentor did not long remain so disinterested. Instead of the pupil, interested in sexless study, she became the lover, with her sole absorbing interest the teacher. What meant the difference in age? She adored the great Swift; she was no longer satisfied to contemplate that wonderful mind, but she wished to possess him fully. So on a day when study somehow dragged, Vanessa stated her feelings with noble frankness. Cadenus (an arrangement of Decanus) was utterly surprised. He could not help being moved by the charming eloquence of Vanessa. She was delightfully logical: Swift had been teaching her how to love the great men of the past, through their writings: but how much better to love the great man who sat by her side, who embodied in living form the greatness she had been admiring on the printed page? Swift replied that he was too old, and urged her to accept his friendship instead of love. Vanessa, made more resourceful in wit by love,

tells Swift that she will now become his teacher and instruct him in the lessons of love. Here the poetical story ends.

While he would not return Vanessa's passion, Swift did not put an end to their relations. They corresponded, she passionately, he by turns tenderly and warningly. After Swift had settled in Dublin as Dean of St. Patrick's, Vanessa, her mother being dead, came with her sister to a family estate at Celbridge, not far from Dublin. Swift will not see her often. His letters are evidently full of stern, reproving words. The unhappy nature of her passion, and an insight into her relations with Swift, are revealed in the following letter she wrote to him:

"You bid me easy, and you would see me as often as you could. You had better have said, as often as you can get the better of your inclinations so much; or as often as you remember there was such a one in the world. If you continue to treat me as you do, you will not be made uneasy by me long. It is impossible to describe what I have suffered since I saw you last; I am sure I could have borne the rack much better than those killing, killing words of yours. Sometimes I have resolved to die without seeing you more; but those resolves, to your misfortune, did not last long; for there is something in human nature that prompts one so to find relief in this world I must give way to it, and beg you would see me, and speak kindly to me; for I am sure you'd not condemn any one to suffer what I have done, could you but know it. The reason I write to you is, because I cannot tell you, should I see you; for when I begin to complain, then you are angry, and there is something in your looks so awful that it strikes me dumb. Oh! that you may have but so much regard for me left

that this complaint may touch your soul with pity. I say as little as ever I can; did you but know what I thought, I am sure it would move you to forgive me; and believe I cannot help telling you this and live."

Again she writes: "Sometimes you strike me with that prodigious awe, I tremble with fear; at other times a charming compassion shines through your countenance, which moves my soul." The tragic end to the romance came in 1723. Vanessa, it is said, wrote to Stella asking her to define her relation to Swift. Stella sent the letter to Swift and, in her jealous displeasure, left Dublin without seeing Swift, going to the country home of a friend. Swift, terribly angry, rode at once to Celbridge, walked into Vanessa's apartment and, throwing the letter upon the table, left without a word.* Within a few weeks Vanessa, unable to withstand this death blow to her love, died. When Swift heard of her death, he left for the south of Ireland, where he spent two months without letting any of his friends know his whereabouts.

Stella died January 28, 1728. She had long been in ill health. On his first trip to England after his retirement from politics, in the summer of 1726, Swift had been called back to

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*Dr. Swift had a natural severity of face, which even his smiles could never soften, or his utmost gaiety render placid and serene; but when that sternness of visage was increased by rage, it is scarce possible to imagine looks or features that carried in them more terror and austerity."—Lord Orrery, "Remarks Upon the Life and Writings of Dr. Jonathan Swift."

Ireland by reports of her dangerous sickness; and when in England again the next summer, he hastened his return for the same cause. The sexless friendship between the two was maintained to the last. In the Dublin days, Stella would act as hostess for the Dean when he entertained on Sundays; she cared for him in sickness; visited him often, but lived apart. Upon her death, Swift wrote a most affecting sketch, full of tender reminiscence and regret, praising her beauty, wit and fidelity. He kept in an envelope a lock of her hair, with the words: *"Only a woman's hair."*

VII.

Gulliver's Travels, Swift's greatest and best known work, was unique in its origin. In the winter of 1713-14 Swift started the Scriblerus Club, a literary society, which was composed of such wits as Pope, Gay, Parnell, Arbuthnot and Swift. One of the plans of the Club was to collaborate upon a satire, which would relate the blunders and follies in the pursuit of knowledge by a fictitious pedant—the satire to be called *The Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus.* Pope, Swift tells in an unpublished letter, first designed the thing. Arbuthnot, in Swift's opinion, was the man to execute it. Both Pope and Arbuthnot played fragmentarily with the idea, their sketches being contained in the three volumes of *Miscellanies* published in 1727-28 by Pope. After the fall of the Tory ministry, the Scriblerus Club died and Swift

as we have seen, went into "exile" in Dublin. Here Swift began to write *Gulliver's Travels*, which took a very different form from the *Memoirs*, but follows that plan in the passages regarding the Academy of Lagado and the floating island in the *Voyage to Laputa*. Swift worked upon *Gulliver* for several years, and it was published anonymously in London in 1726.

Gulliver's Travels, undoubtedly the greatest of all satires, has been widely circulated as a children's book—a fate that not even Swift's prescient irony could have foretold. It is of course expurgated for the nursery. The unrelieved picture of man as an utterly detestable creature, and of all man's interests, pursuits and projects as compact of folly and baseness, is not only over the heads of the children but of many mature readers. Yet the satire, while not exactly obvious, is simple enough. In his *Voyage to Lilliput*, the land of the little people, Swift's aim is to show the triviality of human affairs; by narrating with a grave face the wars, intrigues, jealousies, and curious customs of these infinitesimal creatures, he reveals his conception of the corresponding activities of humanity as alike petty. In the *Voyage to Brobdingnag*, the country of giants, humanity is shown in a conception of grossness. In the *Voyage to Laputa*, pedantry is ridiculed; a race of immortals called the Struldbrugs is described, who after fourscore years gradually sink into a melancholy state of hopeless mental decay, losing even memory; there is a visit to a land of sorcerers, whose gov-

ernor is able to make the dead appear, and Gulliver sees the great figures of history pass in review, seeing them not as heroes but as rogues and impostors, while those who write history are for the most part liars; in the *Voyage to the Houyhnhnms*, Gulliver finds a country where horses, wise and gentle and virtuous, are the rulers over a race of filthy, degraded, repulsive creatures called Yahoos; the Yahoos, whose sordid description is unrelieved by any touch of goodness, represent the human race as Swift, in his most uncompromising pessimism, conceived it.

Gulliver's Travels is written with an art that is peculiar to Swift. The style is a marvel of simplicity and directness—always the precise word is used, and never a word too many; the tale is told with a matter-of-fact carefulness that lends it, in spite of its grotesque representations, an amazing air of reality. It is grave and humorless; there is no attempt at cleverness; there is none of the brilliance that is commonly associated with satire. The human race is damned with a straight face and in plain words, in a tale whose preposterous exaggerations are carefully logical and whose symbolism is somber and restrained from first to last. Swift never lets the reader into the secret by the least gesture or grimace. Not only in general literature is *Gulliver's Travels* a thing apart; but in the special field of satire it is unparalleled in style.

Although the work was published anonymously, the secret of its authorship was known

to Pope, Arbuthnot, Gay and other literary friends and it was not long in becoming generally known. It had a great success, and Arbuthnot wrote to Swift that he would make over his profits in a work he was bringing out "for the property of *Gulliver's Travels*, which, I believe, will have as great a run as *John Bunyan*."

One other episode stands out in Swift's life. Although life in Ireland was all but intolerable to Swift, and he describes himself as returning to it "with an ill head and an aching heart," he was not indifferent to the condition of the country. Indeed, condemned to live there, he could hardly fail to interest himself in the fate of Ireland as determined by English rule. That rule saw one of its worst phases while Swift was Dean of St. Patrick's. In one pamphlet, *A Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufactures*, he had assailed the economic policy of deliberately crippling Irish industry, proposing to the Irish that they should boycott English goods wherever they could use goods made in Ireland. Finally, in 1724, Swift sprang back, full-armed, into the political arena. A patent had been given to William Wood, an obscure hardwareman, for making copper coins for circulation in Ireland. This patent, originally obtained by the Duchess of Kendal, the King's mistress, had been sold by her to Wood for ten thousand pounds. Wood also was to pay a thousand pounds a year for fourteen years to the Crown. The whole thing was done, of course, without consulting either the Irish parliament or people.

While there was perhaps nothing wrong with the coins, here was certainly graft and arbitrary rule; and, it being a dramatic symbol of English misrule, there was considerable opposition to the measure in Ireland. This opposition was given form and direction by Swift, who, through the *Drapier Letters* (written under the assumed character of *M. B. Drapier*), launched a systematic and powerful attack upon the proposed copper half-pence. Convinced that this was a characteristic piece of English injustice, Swift, with little regard for the subtleties of finance, roundly asserted that the coins were fraudulent, and that their circulation would bring down all sorts of calamities upon the Irish people; he drew a complete picture of desolation: "the farmers must rob, or beg, or leave the country; the shopkeepers in this and every other town must break or starve; the squire will hoard up all his good money to send to England and keep some poor tailor or weaver in his house, who will be glad to get bread at any rate." Swift's arguments in these letters were often absurd and contradictory—he even figured with astounding logic that both those who paid out these coins and those who received them in payment would actually lose! Nevertheless, Swift's appeal was so carefully calculated, so subtly adapted to the public mood, that he fanned the indignation against the half-pence into a national revolt; and when, in his last letter, he proposed that every one in Ireland should refuse to accept the half-pence under any circumstance, the defeat of the measure was as-

sured. Although a reward of three hundred pounds was offered for the apprehension of the writer, his identity could not be discovered; and the grand jury refused to order a prosecution against the printer. The patent was dropped and Swift, in the humble character of the drapier, had won a signal triumph over his political enemies. He became a sort of national idol as the result. "When he returned from England, in 1726, bells were rung, bonfires lighted, and a guard of honor escorted him to the deanery:"* When Walpole, prime minister, proposed to arrest Swift, he was warned that it would require an army of ten thousand men. His subsequent influence in Irish affairs is indicated by the expression of Lord Carteret, the governor of Ireland, who wrote, in 1736: "When people ask me how I governed Ireland I say, that I pleased Dr. Swift." In 1729 Swift wrote another pamphlet, *A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People in Ireland from Being a Burden to Their Parents or Country;* his grim, ironic proposal was that the children should be eaten.

Visiting England in 1726-27, Swift grew intimate with Mrs. Howard, mistress of the Prince of Wales, and with the Princess, who shortly became Queen Caroline. The latter was a patroness of men of letters and commanded Swift's presence, which, Swift says, he granted her after nine commands. The friendship of Mrs. Howard and the patronage of the

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*Leslie Stephen.

Princess led to some hope of Swift's return to favor in the future. But when George I. died in 1727 and the Prince of Wales took the throne as George II., Walpole retained his position as minister and Swift's last hope died. He returned to Ireland, never to see England again.

Swift's days as Dean of St. Patrick's, after his final return to Ireland, are not exciting, though they provide a number of singular anecdotes that cannot be related here. He attended with scrupulous exactness to his affairs as Dean, but these could not have employed the greater part of his time. He read, corresponded with his friends in England, enjoyed visits from such old friends as Dr. Sheridan and Dr. Delany, entertained a little. After the death of Stella in 1728, his life was very lonely. He wrote an occasional sketch or poem, but he had not that genuine literary passion that must constantly create. His writings were mostly called forth by his activities—even *Gulliver's Travels* is a sort of broadside against the human race—and when he ceased to be active, he ceased to write. "Art for art's sake" was a phrase unknown to Swift. He relished wit, loved the companionship of literary men and enjoyed solemn foolery such as the Bickerstaff performance; but intense literary work, without the stimulus of combat, must have bored him, for certainly during the long, lonely days in the deanery he wrote very little. His temper, never of the best, grew steadily worse after the death of Stella. He became so miserable that often he begrudged a bottle of wine to a

friend. He was subject to more frequent fits of giddiness, and tormented by a growing deafness. Finally, his eyesight became so bad that he could not read; this was due to his obstinate refusal to wear spectacles. He rode for his health, when two servants went with him for assistance in case he should be seized with a fit of giddiness. When he could not move from the house, he exercised by walking up and down the stairs. He became more gloomy, grew suspicious of those around him, at length fell into an imbecilic stupor and in 1741 was placed under the control of guardians. Before this he had longed for death, and in separating from a friend would say: "Good-night: I hope I shall never see you again." He died October 19, 1745, at three in the afternoon, after a night of convulsions. He left a fortune of twelve thousand pounds, with which, as directed in his will, St. Patrick's Hospital —"a house for fools and mad"—was opened in 1757.

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